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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000148

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/PPD AND ECA DONNA IVES
DUBAI FOR JULLIAN BURNS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/15/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PROP](#) [KPAO](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: IRAN PURSUING ACTIVE PUBLIC DIPLOMACY PROGRAM IN BASRAH,
MAYSAN PROVINCES

CLASSIFIED BY: Alan Latimer, Regional Coordinator, Regional
Embassy Office Basrah, State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

1. (C) Summary. Iran is pursuing an aggressive public diplomacy campaign in Basrah and Maysan Provinces that includes programs similar to the State Department's public diplomacy (PD) programs: visitor programs, book fairs, book reprinting services, libraries and media training programs. In November and December 2005, Basrah TDY PAO met with local journalists, educators and politicians who described in detail examples of these programs operating in Basrah province. Contacts have suggested that these programs are being expanded while coalition PD engagement in the south is limited, particularly due to the security situation. End Summary.

Iranians Gain Influence in Basrah Through Public Diplomacy

2. (S) On December 4, Basrah TDY PAO met with Dr. Hamid Al Dhalemi, , professor at Basrah University and a member of the provincial council. Dr. Al-Dhalemi is also a candidate on Allawi's list (731) and is managing Allawi's campaign in Basrah. Dr. Al-Dhalemi described in detail several Iranian public diplomacy programs operating in Basrah, some in conjunction with Basrah University. He said that in 2005 (specific date not provided) 150 professors from Basrah University traveled to Tehran on an Iranian government sponsored "international visitor" program where they met with former Iranian presidents Rasfanjani and Khatemi and visited with academic colleagues at universities in Iran.

3. (S) Dr. Al-Dhalemi said that book fairs, translation programs and bookstores make up a large part of Iran's PD efforts in Basrah. Four times in 2005, Basrah University held Iranian book fairs on campus. The book fairs included texts promoting conservative religious philosophy and anti-Western themes. Pictures of Iranian religious leaders and recordings of prayers from major Iranian religious leaders were available. On November 12, the university hosted an Iranian book fair. The fair was organized by Toawlee Al Hajaj, who was educated in Iran, and the current director of the central library in Basrah. At the fair, organizers gave out several thousand copies of the book "America in Khameni's point of view" at no cost to the participants. Dr. Al-Dhalemi reported that "Fatim," who he described as a known Iranian intelligence agent, opened the fair.

4. (S) The Iranian Revolutionary Guards (IRG) are operating "dozens" of private bookstores throughout Basrah, according to Dr. Al-Dhalemi. When asked to name a specific store that was being operated by the IRG, he named the "Ali Al Hadi" bookstore in the Ashar district of Basrah. These bookstores are supported by a printing operation in Iran that reprints religious and anti-Western books at a fraction of their cost and illegally transports them into Iraq for resale. Dr. Al-Dhalemi also described a reprinting service at Basrah University operated by professors with Iranian sympathies. These professors take their colleagues' books, research papers and other academic publications to Iran, where they are published in large quantities and then transported back into Iraq for distribution. This program is very attractive to even secular-minded professors who simply want to have their works placed into the public domain.

5. (S) On December 9, Basrah TDY PAO met with Dr. Abdul Kareem Lazim, the head of the English Department at the Basic Education College in Al-Amarah, Maysan province, and the director of Al-Amarah's American Corner, located at the college. Dr. Lazim described many of the same programs as Dr. Al-Dhalemi. In September 2004, June 2005 and September 2005, Iran invited local notables from Maysan province to participate on an international visitor program where they met high level political and education leaders, such as Rasfanjani and Shareeat Madari. According to Dr. Lazim, the trip's participants included Dr. Hussien Jabar Abdullah, dean of the college, Dr. Abbas Uda, assistant professor of Arabic language and Khadim Al Mula, teacher in the college of education. Dr. Lazim also named

Shaheed Al Muhrab, Dar Al Tableeq Al Islami, Thar'Allah, Baathaat'Allah and Al Intefatha Al Shaabany'a as Iranian-funded Islamic organizations that are active in cultural programming in Maysan. Finally, Dr. Lazim said that Iran established the Al-Ukali library in the city center of Al-Amarah, with over 50,000 volumes, a majority of which are religiously focused.

Media Outreach

16. (S) On October 4, Basrah TDY PAO met with Dr. Julianna the chief editor for Al-Akbar newspaper. Dr. Julianna also cited book fairs at Basrah University and visitor programs to Iran as examples of Iran's public diplomacy outreach. She described a new journalism program at the Iman Al-Sadiq college in Al-Amarah, Maysan province. The program was launched this year (no specific date given) and is designed to train Iraqi journalists to portray the news in Iraq from an anti-coalition religious angle. It includes press writing, still photography, video camera operation, and journalistic research techniques, according to Dr. Julianna. When to cite specifics about how the program has a religious Iranian preference, Dr. Julianna replied that in the press writing classes, the professor stresses choice of language, telling the students to use "occupation forces," rather than "coalition forces," and "martyr" or "freedom fighter," instead of "terrorist." When working as a photographer or cameraman, the journalists are encouraged to get footage of American soldiers pointing their weapons at Iraqi civilians, particularly children.

17. (S) On December 5, Basrah TDY PAO met with Wa'ad Al-Sibahi, managing director of Radio Shinasheel in Basrah. Wa'ad said that one of his employees who formerly worked for Al-Nakheel TV and Radio (directly affiliated with SCIRI) told him about an Iranian media training program that he attended in October 2004 for Al-Nakheel employees in Ahfaz, Iran. The training program consisted of technical training on new TV and radio equipment, as well as press writing and videography skills development. Again, there was an emphasis placed on covering the news from an anti-coalition perspective. Wa'ad reported that after returning to Iraq, Al-Nakheel received new equipment from SCIRI to augment their training, including computers, cameras, antennas and TV/radio production and broadcasting equipment.

Iranian "Clear and Hold" Strategy Limits Coalition Influence

18. (S) Comment: Iran is engaging in a substantial public diplomacy outreach program to expand their religious and political influence in southern Iraq. The programs implemented by the Iranians provide highly sought after opportunities for Iraqis: international travel, professional training and access to information resources. Many of the Iranian's public diplomacy programs are similar to ours, but far larger in size and depth than the coalition's efforts in the south. While the world focuses on the Sunni insurgency in central Iraq, Iran continues to use a variety of tactics, including public diplomacy, to expand and institutionalize its influence in the south. Their program remains largely unchecked due to security challenges that limit the coalition's access to the Iraqi population. In many ways they are using a variant of the "clear and hold" strategy of the coalition. The current security environment effectively clears our resources out of key areas and institutions, particularly programs and personnel that focus on cultural and educational outreach. In turn, their programmatic outreach, coupled with threats and intimidation, limits engagement with coalition elements, hampering our efforts to expand and improve relations with the Iraqi people. End Comment.

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